

THE COLORADO NRCS CONNECTION



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Insights & Highlights

by
Allen Green



As usual, we are off to a busy start in this new calendar year. 2004 will bring many new opportunities and we are poised to take full advantage of them all.

In the recent past, NRCS in Colorado, much like the rest of the country, has been forced to do more with less. I'm pleased to say that we are making strides in providing our offices with the resources needed to successfully accomplish the tasks at hand.

We are moving toward new and better technologies, upgrading computers and equipment, and adding to our vehicle fleet.

We have also been able to increase our staffing through a variety of means including permanent staffing, partnership agreements, and contracts with private sources.

These efforts are welcomed as the New Year also brought with it one of the most significant budget increases for USDA conservation programs in U.S. history.

With increased funding comes increased responsibility and accountability. Again, here in Colorado we will be poised and ready to meet the opportunity.

Other new concepts we will need to ready ourselves for are new conservation programs and ways of doing business.

The Conservation Securities Program (CSP) and technical service providers will have a significant impact on how we go about "getting the job done."

However, one thing remains the same, and that's our partnership efforts, or "who helps us get the job done."

Our continued relationship with conservation districts allows us the opportunity to meet and exceed our responsibilities. This is a transitional time for our districts who are stepping forth and providing the local leadership we need and depend on.

We salute those supervisors and board members serve their constituents well.

NRCS will support the districts in this time of change and we look forward to working with the new supervisors and members who will help facilitate a smooth transition.

Zig Ziglar on: What Constitutes a Good Life?

The ultimate expression of life is not a paycheck. The ultimate expression of life is not a Mercedes. The ultimate expression of life is not a million dollars, a bank account, or a home. Here's the ultimate expression of life in my opinion, and that is living the good life. Here's what we must ask constantly, "What for me would be a good life?" And you have to keep going over and over the list. A list including areas such as spirituality, economics, health, relationships and recreation. What would constitute a good life? I've got a short list.

1. Productivity. You won't be happy if you don't produce. The game of life is not rest. We must rest, but only long enough to gather strength to get back to productivity.

see Good Life, page 7

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Raising Environmentally Adapted Cattle

. . . . Pharo Ranch maximizes profit, not production

Story and photos by Jerry Schwein

Kit Pharo believes his ranch should earn a profit every year.

"It's a business, we must make a profit," says Pharo. And that's what he and wife, Deanna, and family have achieved.

Pharo Cattle Company is located eight miles north of Cheyenne Wells in the short-grass prairie of eastern Colorado. They own or lease some 6,000 acres and operate a commercial cowherd, as a registered cowherd.

"Our seedstock program consists of Red Angus, Black Angus, Tarentaise, Hereford, and Composites," says Pharo. Their bull sales have grown from seven when they started in 1990 to over 350 in 2003.

"We have repeat customers from 18 different states," he said.

Over the years, Pharo has observed that every farm or ranch is either "production driven" or "profit driven." He believes that too many are production driven.

"We've been programmed to think in terms of bushels per acre or pounds per calf, instead of in terms

of profit per acre or profit per cow," says Pharo.

He said profitable ranchers have one thing in common. Without exception, they strive to make the most efficient use of the forage resources on their ranch. This requires a three-legged approach:

1) Management-Intensive Grazing - properly managed and controlled rotational grazing,

2) Matching the Production Cycle to Your Forage Resources - calving and weaning in sync with Mother Nature, and

3) Matching Cow Size and Type to Forage Resources - producing cows that can survive on what the ranch produces with little or no inputs.

The Pharos began implementing their management-intensive grazing system in 1994 with technical grazing assistance from the Soil Conservation Service, now the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) and after piping some water and building cross-fences.

The Great Plains Conservation Program, through the NRCS, provided cost-share for the water delivery system. The crossfencing was done on their own.

"We started with 12 paddocks and now have 24," says

Pharo. *"This allows us to increase grass production by providing more time for rest and growth of the plants,"* he said.

The basic rule of thumb is to rotate cattle fast when the grass is growing fast and slow when the grass is growing slow.

Pharo says cattle must be moved to new pasture before they have the opportunity to graze any plants for the second time. A typical year in his grazing system allows each paddock to be grazed twice during the growing season for a total of 8 to 10 days and once for 10 to 12 days during the winter months.

"With our system," says Pharo, *"every acre of grass is grazed only 20 days each year and rested 345 days."*

Ben Berlinger, NRCS Rangeland Management Specialist, La Junta, Colo., says, *"Over the years the Pharo's have adopted some excellent prescribed grazing management practices. Kit controls the frequency and intensity of each grazing event so that grazing periods are kept as short as possible."*

"The prescribed grazing that the Pharo's have implemented has definitely helped to maintain their rangeland condition and plant vigor through our recent drought," he said.

During the drought, Kit was forced to sell some replacement heifers, divide paddocks into smaller pastures, graze the Conservation Reserve Program, and move his entire cow herd back east to greener pastures in the fall of 2002. He brought some of the cows back in June 2003 when early spring moisture was good.

Next in their management sys-



Ben Berlinger, Natural Resources Conservation Service Rangeland Management Specialist, left, and Kit Pharo discuss the benefits of Pharo's management-intensive grazing system during severe drought in eastern Colorado.



One of Kit Pharo's prize bulls. During their fall bull sale, the Pharos sold 131 range-ready bulls ranging in price from \$1,500 to over \$6,000.

tem, is matching the production cycle to the ranch's available forage resources. Forage availability and nutritional value are extremely low until new growth begins in the spring.

"When the cow's needs are not being met by the forage resources on the ranch," says Pharo, "it means a huge feed bill."

"I've concluded that I cannot afford to feed a cow everything she needs to raise a calf and breed back before the grass starts to green up," he said.

In Pharo's system, when he calves in late April and May, instead of in February, there is a big difference in the amount of supplemental feed required by cows. This can easily save up to \$100 per cow.

"When the forage resources on my ranch can no longer meet the nutritional requirements of a lactating cow, it is time to wean calves," Pharo continued.

"If I have to do some supplemental feeding, it's much more cost-effective to put my feed dollars directly into the calf, instead of trying to run them through the mother cow," he said.

Pharo believes much potential profit is lost because most producers are not calving and weaning in sync with nature.

"I know of producers who are saving thousands of dollars after making this simple change," he

said.

"One ranch in particular went from calving in March to calving in May. They start calving May 15. In the process they have reduced their feed expenses by 75 percent."

Finally, Pharo's system strives to match cow size and type to forage resources. This means selecting and

breeding cows that can survive strictly on what the ranch produces.

Pharo says, *"All cows are not created equal. Some cows are much more efficient and much more profitable than others are."*

So, how do you identify the most efficient cows?

"What we do is identify our least efficient cows and get rid of them," says Pharo.

"Over the years, we have made a conscious effort to gradually reduce our feed and feed expenses. This caused our hard-keeping, less-efficient cows to come up open or late-bred in the fall," he said.

"These are the cows that do not fit my environment. They require more than my ranch produces and they must be culled and sold," says Pharo.

Pharo explains that unless you have an unlimited amount of extremely cheap feed, you cannot afford to feed and maintain cows that weigh over 1,200 pounds.

"Even if feed is extremely cheap," says Pharo, "I would rather run a higher number of smaller cows on the same forage resources."

"If a ranch can support 100

cows that weigh 1,200 pounds, it should be able to support 120 cows that weigh 1,000 pounds. That's 20 percent more cows producing 20 percent more calves. Those 120 smaller cows will always out produce the 100 larger cows," he said.

Berlinger explains that the Pharos use fecal sampling combined with the Nutrition Balance Analyzer (NUTBAL) program to monitor forage quality throughout the grazing season.

The Pharos also monitor their rangeland trend using photo points and the land EKG methodology developed by Charlie Orchard.

The success of the Pharo's operation was again evidenced at their Fall Bull Sale, November 1. During a time when ranchers were still worried about drought and herd size, the Pharos conducted a record bull sale, selling 131 animals for an overall average price of \$3,353. The highest priced bull (PCC Z-

Best), a son of PCC Colorado Hobo, sold for \$6,160.

Pharo says, *"To achieve optimum production, ranchers must produce cows*

that fit their environment, instead of artificially changing the environment to fit their cows."

"Since many ranchers have cows that are too big and inefficient, they are forced to feed harvested and purchased feed to keep their cows in production. This quickly takes most of the profit out of ranching. The easiest way to make money is to save money," he says.

If you'd like to learn more about the Pharo's ranching history and philosophy, you may log onto their website at: www.pharo-cattle.com.

"If I have to do some supplemental feeding, it's much more cost-effective to put my feed dollars directly into the calf, instead of trying to run them through the mother cow."

-- Kit Pharo

on the pulse

Area Office News

Area One

Rank and design work is beginning with landowners who have requested Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) contracts. One group project is in Missouri Heights with five landowners. The Dahmer group is moving forward with their design with **Mike Kishimoto's**, Soil Conservation Technician, Glenwood Springs, assistance. This group has eleven members with similar problems.

Tom Clark's, landowner, EQIP project will be installed this fall. He is working with the utility company to run his power this spring.

Dennis Davidson, District Conservationist, and **Sharie Prow**, Conservation District Manager, both in Glenwood Springs, attended ProTracts training on February 5, conducted by **Mike Wall**, Resource Conservationist, Greeley, and **Charlie Holcomb**, Area Agronomist, Grand Junction area office. The NRCS staff is trained and has inputted all of the EQIP applications. Survey and design work is now in progress as well as planning Toolkit and Arcview programs.

Mount Sopris CD, Natural Resources Conservation Service and Bureau of

Reclamation, conducted a Water Measurement Class for interested up valley landowners. Dan Crabtree gave a demonstration on water measurement, **Mike Wall**, Resource Conservationist, Greeley, discussed using flow meters for water measurement and Bill Blakesley, Water Commissioner, discussed the roles of a water commissioner and the new billing procedure through the Division of Water Resources.

The Colorado Association of Conservation Districts Employees Association and Colorado State Conservation Board (CSCB) provided a safety training class for sixteen district employees and Natural Resources Conservation Service employees. **Jan Glass**, President and Conservation District Manager, Meeker, gave the opening statements. **Carl Zimmerman**, CSCB, Grand Junction area office, discussed safety on the job. Topics included office, field, construction and trenching safety.

Snow survey has been completed for Nast Lake, McGenzie Gulch and Shrine Pass.

Annual Ag Day was held on January 29, 2004, at the New Castle Community Center. This year's meeting focused on conservation easements, West

Nile disease, and the management of the pinon Ips beetle infestation. Participating partners included land appraisers, Colorado Cattlemen's Agriculture Land Trust, estate planners, CSU Extension Service, US Forest Service, and Colorado State. **Mike Kishimoto**, Soil Conservation Technician, **Dennis Davidson**, District Conservationist, and **Sharie Prow**, CD Manager, all in the Glenwood Springs field office prepared BBQ pork, cole slaw and cake for lunch.

John Denison, District Forester, Colorado State Forest Service, hosted a Seedling Tree Workshop at the Garfield County Annex Building. Denison discussed species selection, location, soils, and survival techniques for the seedlings. The Conservation Districts work with the Colorado State Forest Service to provide seedling trees to landowners at a nominal fee. The program's objective is to encourage landowners to plant new forests, establish effective windbreaks to reduce erosion, and enhance wildlife habitat.

Dennis Davidson, District Conservationist in Glenwood Springs has been teaching the Quality Living on your Rural Land class to new and small landowners for the past six

years. This workshop provides vital information to help evaluate the resource potential of property and how to properly manage those resources.

Topics include soils, water and irrigation, pastures and hayland management, plants (including weeds), and wildlife. Classes will be held at the Glenwood Springs field office, on Tuesdays, March 9, 16, 23 and 30.

Area Two

Blake Hendon, Rangeland Management Specialist, Akron Field Office, conducted field visit for Idalia Ag Class on rangeland inventories and management strategies. These high school students were able to receive hands on training with plant identification, plant density, and overall production assessments.



What a great way to start the new year for over 200 participants at the Four States Irrigation Council's 51st annual meeting. The participants listened to a presentation by **Todd Boldt**, District Conservationist, Fort Collins, on the 2002 Farm Bill.

The Council serves as a forum for irrigators and irrigation system operators in Kansas, Wyoming, Nebraska and Colorado to exchange ideas and information about problems and solutions for irrigated agriculture in the region.

Gene Backhaus, District Conservationist, Lakewood Field Office, and others provided presentations to the Geological Society of America (GSA) on fire rehabilitation efforts on the Hi Meadow Fire. The talk centered on the practices used, funding, and the process for completing the installation through the Emergency Watershed Protection program. About 150 people signed up for the tour.

The Simla Field Office staff worked with the Double El CD on two tree workshops. One was completed on Jan 5th at Miama-Yoder School. Dennis Will, Colorado State Forest Service, provided a presentation on tree selection and correct planting of windbreaks and shelterbelts.

The second workshop was held in the Simla Service Center on January 12th. Assistance on design and layout of tree species was provided to producers by **Lana Pearson** District Conservationist, **Benny Kitten** Soil Conservation Technician, **Cheryl Churchwell** District Manager Double El CD, **Susan Hare**, Conservation Aid Double El CD, and **Steve Evanoika**, Earth Team Volunteer, all located in the Simla field office.

The Longmont Field Office recently participated in the USDA Food Drive, which resulted in the distribution of 3,500 pounds of food throughout Boulder County.

Longmont has also been conducting several outreach and conservation education activities with their Stream Table and Ground Water model at local elementary schools. They have presented at eight classes that have over 220 students from diverse ethnic and economic backgrounds.

Area Three

In Memory of:

Stanley S. Barron, Jr., age 82, passed away at home on January 17, 2004. He was a member of the Spanish Peaks- Purgatoire River Conservation District from 1967 to the present, serving as president for 18 of those years. Stanley also served on the Colorado Division of Wildlife's Bosque del Oso Management Advisory Committee, Trinidad, Las Animas County Chamber of Commerce. He was a member of numerous other local organizations, including the Southern Colorado Cattlemen's Association.

Barron is survived by his wife Linda T. Barron of Stonewall, a son, stepdaughters, and grandchildren.

The Teller-Park Conserv. District recently sponsored a short tour for congressional staffers and local officials. Loren Whittemore and Ellen Cesarone from Representative Joel Hefley's office, Teller County Commissioner, Bob Campbell, and Terry Van Keuren from Representative Tom Tancredo's office, toured some of the successful treatment areas of the Hayman Fire.

Conservation district board members and **Leon Kot**, Woodland Park NRCS office, showed areas needing additional erosion protection, and discussed potential fire management solutions such as small diameter timber harvest/biofuels. Work is underway to have a regional workshop to address these and related issues.

Representatives of the Canon City USDA Service Center met with Representative Joel Hefley to discuss issues of local concern prior to the beginning of the 2004 congressional session.

Also present at the meeting, were representatives from the Fremont Conservation District, other local units of government, Bureau of Prisons, and Bureau of Land Management.

Rick Romano, District Conservationist, Canon City, discussed administrative changes within NRCS offices and the meaning behind the changes. Lou Ann Brunetto, Farm Service Agency County Executive Director, discussed the need to continue with ongoing disaster programs to meet the needs of agricultural producers as a result of the drought.

Discussions also focused on water issues and plans to build a large reservoir on Oak Creek as a combination reservoir and flood detention structure.

The La Junta area office hosted an Open House for all Area 3 employees. Area staff provided a dinner with all the trimmings and treats. **John Knapp**, Area Conservationist, La Junta, handed out awards to those recipients in attendance.

Several personnel from NRCS received the President's Citation from Wendell Hassell, 2003 President, Colorado Chapter of the Soil and Water Conservation Society. Awardees included:

Amy Sidener, Soil Conservationist, Delta, **Kristi Gay**, District Conservationist, Flagler, and **Tony Arnhold**, Soil Conservationist, Trinidad, **Beth Fortman**, Soil Conservationist,

Pueblo, **Barb Gohlke**, Soil Conservationist, Colorado Springs, **Charlie Pannebaker**, Resource Conservationist, La Junta area office, **Rich Rhoades**, District Conservationist, Pueblo, and **Mary Miller**, Area Public Affairs Specialist, La Junta area office.

Ben Berlinger, Area Rangeland Management Specialist, La Junta area office, has worked with two Colorado high school students on presentations for the Society for Range Management (SRM), High School Youth Forum (HSYF) competition held at the Society's annual meeting in February in Salt Lake City, Utah. Berlinger has served as the Colorado SRM HSYF chair for many years.



Area Four

More than 250 people attended the 27th Annual Western Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Association Meeting held in Bismarck, North Dakota, from January 24 - 28, 2004.

The Western RC&D is made up of 60 Councils, eight in Colorado, from eleven western states. Colorado had seven people in attendance and Meghan Phillips, Big Country RC&D, was elected Secretary.

Networking was a key activity that evolved during the four-day meeting. There was much to learn from other Western RC&D Councils.

The San Luis Valley RC&D Council was awarded co-

outstanding RC&D Council for 2004 by the Western RC&D Association. Jim Mietz, RC&D Coordinator, San Luis Valley, was awarded as co-outstanding RC&D Coordinator for 2004. *Congratulations!*

Good luck to Ben Rizzi, former District Conservationist for the La Jara field office! Rizzi retired in early January 2004 after 32 years with NRCS.

NRCS HOLDS MEETING ON CONSERVATION SECURITY PROGRAM

Colorado NRCS, held an informational meeting on February 11, 2004, on the Conservation Security Program (CSP) Proposed Rule that was published in the Federal Register on January 2, 2004.

The meeting consisted of a PowerPoint presentation on the proposed rule, comments, and a question and answer session from the audience.

The proposed rule will support ongoing conservation stewardship of agricultural lands by providing payments to producers who maintain and enhance the conditions of natural resources.

CSP will identify and reward those farmers and ranchers who are meeting the highest standards of conservation and environmental management on their operations.

Through these rewards, CSP will build a foundation of natural resource conservation that will provided benefits to the public for generations to come.

March 2, 2004, was the cutoff date for accepting comments on this proposed rule.

UP AND COMING



**You may
want to
jot this
down!**

LT Teleconference -----Mar. 8

NACD Legislative Conf. -----Mar. 15-18

NLT Mtg. -----Mar. 17-18

Repub. Watershed Mtg -----Mar. 22

L. South Platte Watershed Mtg. --Mar.23

L. Arkansas Watershed Mtg. -----Mar. 31

GLCI Mtg. -----Apr. 1-2

RC&D Training -----Apr. 1-2

EASTER -----Apr. 11

In State LT Mtg. -----Apr. 13-16

U. Arkansas Watershed Mtg. -----Apr. 13

TAX DEADLINE -----Apr. 15

Technology Team Mtg. -----Apr.21-22

NEPA Training -----Apr. 27-28



Robert Zebroski
Director

In March and April, CACD will conduct ten watershed meetings with state and federal agencies. The aim is to promote participation in conservation programs through the conservation districts.

An agreement is being developed between the District and YW Well Test Association to provide irrigation water management services to producers in Yuma and Washington counties.

The Branson-Trinchera CD plan to conduct an election in May 2004 to gain approval from the voters for a mill levy and to "de-Tabor" their budget process.

The North Park CD has a new contractor who is serving as the district manager. *Welcome.*

Bear Creek High School in Lakewood is on the forefront of conservation education. It is offering its seniors a class in agriculture. Each of the students will spend a week on a working farm or ranch to gain experience in the conservation of our natural resources. **Bob Zebroski**, Director, Colorado State Conservation Board, spoke to the class on the NACD Envirothon Program, which is an opportunity to compete with teams from other states on their knowledge of the natural resources.



Good Life, cont'd from page 1

2. Good friends. Friendship is probably the greatest support system in the world. Don't deny yourself the time to develop this support system. Nothing can match it. It's extraordinary in its benefit. Friends are those wonderful people who know all about you and still like you.

3. Culture. Your language, your music, the ceremonies, the traditions, the dress. All of that is so vitally important that you must keep it alive. In fact it is the uniqueness of all of us that when blended together brings vitality, energy, power, influence, uniqueness and rightness to the world.

4. Spirituality. It helps to form the foundation of the family that builds the nation. And make sure you study, practice and teach. Don't be careless about the spiritual part of your nature, it's what makes us who we are, different from animals, dogs, cats, birds and mice.

5. Family and the inner circle. Invest in them and they'll invest in you. Inspire them and they'll inspire you. It's the special stuff with the inner circle that makes you strong and powerful and influential. So don't miss that opportunity.

So make sure in your busy day to remember the true purpose and the reasons you do what you do. Live a vital life. Here's one of the reasons why. If you live well, you will earn well. If you live well it will show in your face, it will show in the texture of your voice. There will be something unique and magical about you if you live well. It will infuse not only your personal life but also your business life. And it will give you a vitality nothing else can give. May you truly live the kind of life that will bring the fruit and rewards that you desire.

Agricultural forum examines alternative sources to profits

More than 350 agricultural producers and representatives attended this year's Colorado Agricultural Outlook Forum held at the Renaissance Hotel in Denver on February 19, 2004.

Profits Outside the Box: Agriculture and Beyond provided the latest information on renewable energy and wind as a means to alternate energy sources.

"The forum will provide a look into the future and at different forms of renewable energy,"

Don Ament, Colorado Commissioner of Agriculture, said during opening statements.

"Today we will reaffirm our commitments and our partnerships in agriculture and move forward," he said.

The forum addressed wind energy development, biofuels and bioproducts, carbon sequestration and information about alternative sources of income for landowners.



Don Ament, Colorado Commissioner of Agriculture

"This year's forum is an opportunity to learn about wind, biofuels, and carbon credits and how they contribute to the bottom line of Colorado agricultural producers," Ament said.

"Using these resources will increase profits and economic development in the rural agricultural communities in Colorado," he said.

The forum included breakout sessions that summarized small and large-scale wind energy products and sessions on biofuels and bioproducts and the importance of cooperatives in renewable energy products.

Rusks Awarded 2004 Leopold Conservation Award

Randy and Claricy Rusk received the 2004 Leopold Conservation Award at this year's Colorado Agricultural Outlook Forum held on February 19, 2004, at the Renaissance Hotel in Denver.

Based on their outstanding management of the Rusk Hereford Ranch and other key ranches in the northern half of the Wet Mountain Valley, the Rusks have led the way in Custer County with progressive ranch management and some of the first conservation easements to slow the expansion of subdivision into the Valley's working lands.

The Rusks serve on many boards, associations and foundations, demonstrating a true commitment to leadership and civic responsibility within their community and throughout the industry.

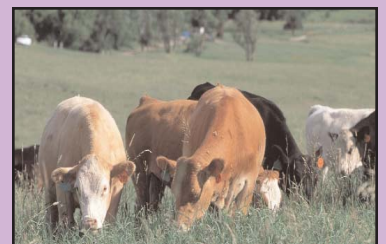
The Leopold Conservation Award recognizes and further encourages conservation leadership in the ranching

community. T

This award that has been established by the Colorado Cattlemen's Association, the Colorado Cattlemen's Agricultural Land Trust and Sand County Foundation.

The award salutes the individual or group who sets the most impressive example of providing conservation of soil, water, and wildlife. It also encourages innovation and bridge-building within the ranching community and between ranchers and conservation organizations.

The award consists of a \$10,000 cash prize and a crystal artist's rendering of Aldo Leopold on horseback.



Colorado's Snowpack Tracking Below Average

by Mike Gillespie, Snow Survey Supervisor

February's weather patterns brought insignificant changes or improvements to Colorado's snowpack.

The latest surveys, taken near the end of February by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (NRCS), show the State's snowpack is 89 percent of average, and is 107 percent of last year's snowpack readings.

The February storm track continued to bring the wettest storms across the southern portion of the state, while northern Colorado was missed by most storms during the month.

As a result, the snowpack in the southern mountains remains above average, while the northern mountains suffered another dry month and contin-

ue to lag below average.

This weather trend brings drought relief to southern Colorado, which has thus far suffered the driest conditions during the recent drought. Meanwhile, water shortages across northern Colorado's river basins are expected to continue with summer runoff much lower than last year in some basins, according to Allen Green, State Conservationist with the NRCS.

Currently, those basins with a lower snowpack than last year include the Colorado and North and South Platte basins.

"Not only were these basins in better shape last year, but they then benefited the most from the late-March blizzard which really helped to

improve water supplies. Without a similar wet spring this year, these basins can expect a return to significant shortages this summer," said Green.

Across Colorado, as

well as most of the Western U.S., the melting snowpack accounts for as much as 80 percent of the annual surface water supplies.

NRCS hydrologists use snowpack data, along with various other hydrologic parameters, to forecast spring and summer runoff volumes across the state.

Given the current conditions, runoff volumes for the coming spring and summer range from slightly above average in a few basins across southern Colorado, to well below average along the Front Range.

While a repeat of last year's March snowfall would bring the South Platte Basin snowpack back to average by April 1, the probability of a repeat again this year is very unlikely, even though March is typically the snowiest month along the Front Range.

Only adding to the water supply concerns is the continued below average reservoir storage across the state.

Statewide totals remain at only 78 percent of average and are the lowest across the Arkansas and Rio Grande basins. About the only bright spot concerning reservoir storage is that it's consistently generally above those volumes of last year at this same time.

**Colorado's Snowpack and Reservoir Storage
(as of March 1, 2004)**

BASIN	% AVERAGE SNOWPACK	% LAST YR.'S SNOWPACK	% AVERAGE RESERVOIR STORAGE	% LAST YR.'S RESERVOIR STORAGE
Gunnison	101	119	93	125
Colorado	83	90	86	242
South Platte	69	87	83	153
North Platte	81	97	---	---
Yampa/White	89	100	110	119
Arkansas	90	106	53	116
Rio Grande	106	148	43	70
San Juan, Animas, Dolores	105	136	67	115
Statewide	89	107	78	145

NRCS PARTICIPATES IN GARDEN AND HOME SHOW

NRCS participated in the 2004 Garden and Home Show, which ran from February 7th - 15th. More than 67,000 enthusiasts were in attendance at this event.

Living Colorado Style, the theme to this year's booth, was sponsored by NRCS, Jefferson County Cooperative Extension, Jefferson Conservation District, West Arapahoe Conservation District, Colorado State Forest Service, State Soil Conservation Board, Douglas City Natural Resources Conservation District, USDA Forest Service, and Southeast Weld Conservation District. The booth provided educational information on backyard con-

servation practices and fire safety.

Next year's theme will be *Landowning Colorado Style* and will focus on land management, soils, trees, water and water quality, weeds, and grazing, to name a few.



The *Living Colorado Style* Booth at the 2004 Garden and Home show, Denver Colorado Convention Center, February 7-15.

Celebrate Women's History Month

The official theme for this year's celebration is **"Women Sustaining the American Spirit."**

The first International Women's Day was March 8, 1911. In 1981, U.S. Representative Barbara Mikulski and U.S. Senator Orrin Hatch cosponsored a Joint Congressional Resolution proclaiming the week of March 8 as National Women's History Week.

In 1986, the National Women's History Project helped expand the celebration to the entire month of March. In 1987 and subsequent years, **National Women's History Month** resolutions have been approved by Congress.

Check out the many interesting events highlighting Women's History Month by visiting the Feminist Majority website calendar at:

<http://www.feminist.org/calendar/Calendar.asp>.

NATIONALLY SPEAKING

\$1.5 Billion for NRCS Voluntary Conservation Programs in FY 2004

Agriculture Under Secretary for Natural Resources and Environment Mark Rey announced the release of nearly \$1.5 billion in funding for conservation programs on working lands this fiscal year. The distribution of funds to states makes conservation programs administered by the Natural Resources Conservation Service operational.

"These funds demonstrate the Bush Administration's commitment to working lands and to maintaining high environmental stewardship in communities across the nation," Rey said. *"The Department of Agriculture remains committed to providing the conservation tools and resources to ensure that the land remains both healthy and productive."*

The FY 2004 allocations to states include \$1.2 billion in financial assistance and \$305 million for technical assistance for NRCS Farm Bill programs and other activities. At least \$30 million of the technical assistance funds will be used for technical service providers.

USDA Announces New Minority Scholarship Programs



USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Bruce Knight announced two new minority pilot scholarship programs that will be offered in 2004.

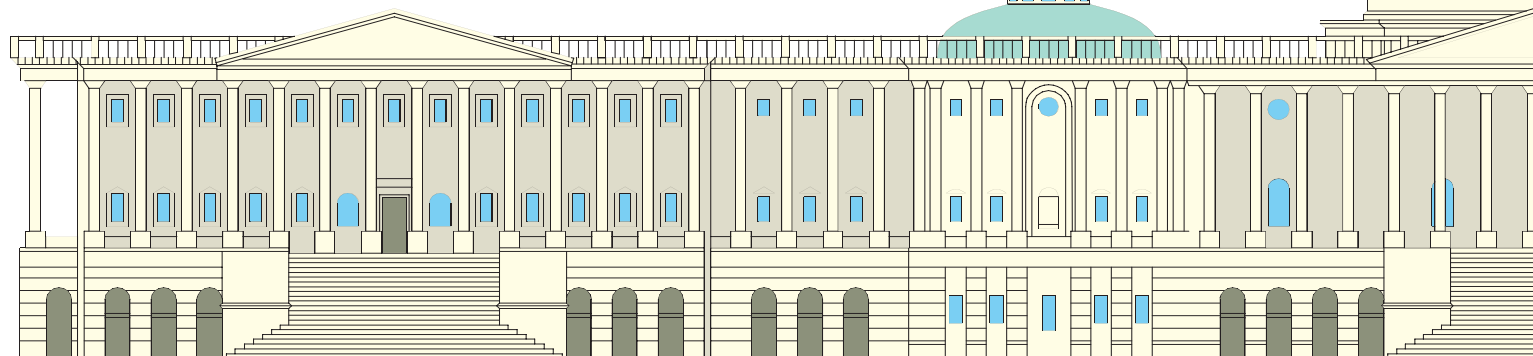
"These scholarship opportunities help attract outstanding students from underrepresented groups to pursue careers in agriculture and natural resource sciences. Through workforce planning and scholarship programs, we are creating a more effective government by attracting and educating students from diverse backgrounds to be quality employees by ensuring that they have the skills to perform at high levels," Knight said during the National Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting being held here.

The new pilot Asian and Pacific Islander (API) Scholarship Program will offer scholarships to U.S. citizens who are seeking a

degree in agriculture or related natural resource sciences at universities with high percentages of Asian and Pacific Islander students in California, Hawaii, Minnesota and the Pacific Basin

Area. The new Tribal Scholarship Program pilot will have similar eligibility requirements and will be available to students at 1994 Tribal Land Grant Colleges.

Information on the new scholarship programs will be available soon at <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov> or from Larry Holmes, NRCS Outreach Division Director, at 301-504-2229 or larry.holmes2@usda.gov. Information on the USDA, 1890 National Scholars Program is at <http://1890Scholars.program.usda.gov>. Information on the Public Service Leaders Scholarship is at <http://www.hsi.usda.gov/Scholars/main.htm>.



USDA Provides \$3 Million for Conservation Projects that Benefit Coral Reefs

USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service Chief Bruce Knight announced that \$3 million will be provided for innovative conservation projects on private land to improve water quality in watersheds that outlet to coral reef habitats. A special priority will be given to projects involving limited resource farmers that reduce land-based impacts on coral reefs.

The funds will be made available to conservation districts, resource conservation and development areas, state and local governments, educational institutions and other nonprofit organizations through the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation's (NFWF) 2004 Conservation on Private Lands matching grant program.

"This valuable partnership promotes the conservation and protection of our ocean and coastal resources. At our request, the National Fish and Wildlife

Foundation has agreed to add a new programmatic theme to its 2004 grant program focused on improving land-use practices on agricultural land upstream from coral reef ecosystems,"

Knight said during remarks at the National Association of Conservation Districts Annual Meeting being held here.

Conservation Security Program Listening Forums

NRCS held 10 listening sessions nationwide to gain feedback on a proposed rule to implement the Conservation Security Program (CSP).

"USDA holding the listening sessions to give the public ample opportunity to voice their opinions about the new program," Veneman said. *"The public input will be very important as we develop the final regulations for program implementation."*

The CSP proposed rule was published in the Federal Register on Jan. 2, 2004. Comments are due by March 2 2004. The 10 national listening sessions were held in the following locations:

Jan. 13 Tempe, AZ
Jan. 13 Roanoke, VI
Jan. 21 Kerrville, TX
Jan. 27 Spokane, WA
Feb. 10 Lansing, MI
Feb. 11 Ft. Pierce, FL
Feb. 11 Des Moines, IA
Feb. 11 Augusta, ME
Feb. 11 Greenwood, MS
Feb. 26 Madison, WI

Colorado held its own listening session on February 11, 2004. See article, page 6.

Now Available -- National Animal Agriculture Conservation Framework



In the Federal Register, NRCS announces publication of the National Animal Agriculture Conservation Framework, which lays out a blueprint for meeting the environmental stewardship challenges facing animal agriculture over the next 10 to 15 years. The National Framework reflects input from state and basin area frameworks and comments received during the public review period conducted in September 2003.

The National Framework is online (see link below) or in hard copy from Angel Figueroa, NRCS Animal Husbandry and Clean Water Programs Division, phone: 301-504-2225, or email angel.figueroa@usda.gov.

